

**Testimony in support of DPH funding for gun violence prevention  
February 24, 2022**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Bishop James Curry. I am from New Haven. I am a retired bishop of the Episcopal Church and am a co-founder and chief blacksmith of Swords to Plowshares Northeast, a 501(c)3 organization that works with towns and cities to organize gun buybacks and then under police supervision to destroy the guns so that using blacksmithing and wood turning skills we can transform those weapons of potential harm (from accidents, suicides, and crimes) into gardening tools (instruments of hope and nurture). We give these tools away to community gardens, churches, schools, and youth violence interruption programs. We are active in towns and cities across the State of Connecticut.

I am testifying in support of the \$3.6 million included in the Governor's budget adjustment bill for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence prevention programs.

We encourage people to voluntarily give up the guns that are a danger in their homes and we advocate for safe storage of guns by making gun safes and locks available. We also encourage people to invite us to bring the forge to their community. We are mobile and can augment almost any other approach to gun violence prevention in our cities and towns. We are experiential and hands on.

I am here today to speak to a multi-pronged, collaborative, and experiential approach to gun violence prevention in our communities. I want to underscore the need for coordination and support at the State level. The work and outreach of volunteer organizations like ours will

be enhanced by a staffed program through the Department of Public Health.

Swords to Plowshares Northeast has captured the imagination of people across this state and operates under the banner of Isaiah 2:4 “They shall beat their swords into Plowshares and the spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not raise up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Translated for today the passage goes something like this: “They shall beat their guns into garden tools. Neighbor shall not raise up gun against neighbor, neither shall they learn violence anymore.” Part of our value is that we captured an ancient hope and put it into concrete modern terms. That gun becomes this tool. The guns that are turned in are not just thrown in a grinder to be silently disposed of – they become evidence that we need not be bound to the violence of guns.

We are an educational outreach that spans our cities and towns. This process of transformation not only creates tools, it gives power and hope to people who have been harmed greatly by guns in our society.

We believe that starting with this funding, the Department of Public Health can be an information clearing house and source of coordination for community centered anti-violence groups across the state. We seek cooperation, not competition in anti-violence work.

Gun Buybacks seem to be very effective if you listen to press reports – but we need to collect data and analyze it to be evidenced based. Swords to Plowshares Northeast has been doing this kind of work from our inception. We also see a need to fund more research about the value of Community Gardens and green spaces in our neighborhoods. We need to go from anecdotal stories to evidence based research. This work will require access to funding by small community focused groups like ours.

Funding through the Department of Public Health will help organizations across Connecticut explore new strategies to invite people in our communities to give up their guns. We must be nimble, mobile and innovative.

I commend Governor Lamott for proposing \$3.6 million to fund community gun violence prevention programs, I urge the Legislature to do more. Now is the time to create an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in the Department of Public Health, and commit to more substantial levels of funding to build on and support the work already happening in Connecticut.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Sincerely,

The Right Reverend James E. Curry  
New Haven, CT